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SUBJECT: ITALY COMMITS ITSELF TO RESEARCH COOPERATION IN AGRICULTURE BIOTECHNOLOGY

REFS: A) ROME 1965 B) ROME 2999 C) ROCK-MULENEX TELCOM JULY

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1. THIS IS AN ACTION REQUEST, SEEKING OES RESPONSE TO REFS A AND B. SEE PARAGRAPH 4.

2. EMBASSY PROVIDES INFORMAL TRANSLATION OF A LETTER SENT TO ESTCOUNS FROM ANTONIO CATRICALA, SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS. THE LETTER IS DATED JUNE 24 BUT WAS RECEIVED ON JULY 1.

BEGINNING OF INFORMAL EMBASSY TRANSLATION:

IN REFERENCE TO YOUR LETTER TO U/S LETTA SENT ON APRIL 18 AND SIGNED ALSO BY PROF. LEONARDO SANTI, I CAN CONFIRM, ALSO WITH U/S LETTA'S APPROVAL, THE INTEREST AND COMMITMENT OF THE ITALIAN GOVERNMENT FOR A FRUITFUL COOPERATION WITH THE U.S. ON BIOTECHNOLOGY RESEARCH.

I REVIEWED THE PROPOSED TOPICS AND BELIEVE THAT THE AGREED ISSUES COULD REPRESENT CONCRETE INITIATIVES.

IN THE BIOTECHNOLOGY FIELD, THE PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS IS SUPPORTING A DEVELOPING PLAN, WHICH WILL BE CARRIED OUT BY A WORKING GROUP WITHIN THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR BIOSAFETY AND BIOTECHNOLOGY. THE WORKING GROUP WILL

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INCLUDE THE PRESIDENCY, THE INTERESTED MINISTRIES, THE REGIONS AND THE COMPANY SVILUPPO ITALIA (ITALIAN DEVELOPMENT).

THE PROGRAM WILL HAVE TO TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION, IN A PRIORITY WAY, THE NATIONAL AND EUROPEAN NEEDS, BUT IT SHOULD ALSO EVALUATE, IN AN HARMONIC WAY, THE INDISPENSABLE TOOLS FOR THE WHOLE DEVELOPMENT OF BIOTECHNOLOGY INCLUDING THOSE SUBJECTS MENTIONED IN YOUR LETTER.

WITHIN THE PRIORITIES TO BE CONSIDERED:

- THE FIGHT AGAINST BIOTERRORISM
- ENVIRONMENTAL REMEDIATION TECHNOLOGIES
- BIOTECHNOLOGY CONTRIBUTION TO FOOD QUALITY
- BUILDING DEVELOPING WORLD CAPACITY TO EVALUATE BIOTECHNOLOGIES.

I BELIEVE THAT THE ACTIVE U.S.-ITALY COOPERATION COULD CONTRIBUTE TO REACHING THE COMMON OBJECTIVES OF OUR TWO COUNTRIES. WISHING YOU A GOOD WORK, I SEND YOU MY BEST REGARDS.

END OF EMBASSY INFORMAL TRANSLATION.

3. COMMENT: THE LETTER, COMING FROM THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE, IS FORMAL GOI APPROVAL FOR BILATERAL COOPERATION ON BIOTECHNOLOGY. THE LETTER REFLECTS A DECISION WITHIN THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE TO USE SCIENCE AS A LEVER TO CREATE MORE ROOM FOR BIOTECHNOLOGY OPTIONS, ESPECIALLY WITH REGARD TO THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE'S POSITION AGAINST COMMERCIALIZATION OF AGROBIOTECHNOLOGY. AS REPORTED IN REF A, THE GOI HAS ALREADY NAMED EXPERTS (31 IN TOTAL) FOR EACH OF TEN SUBJECT AREAS OF MUTUAL INTEREST AND PROPOSED A BILATERAL EXPERTS MEETING ON AGRICULTURAL BIOTECHNOLOGY TO

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BE HELD LATER THIS YEAR. WE BELIEVE THIS IS THE CORRECT, NEXT STEP IN OUR EFFORT TO RAISE THE BAR ON THE QUALITY OF SCIENCE NEEDED TO UNDERPIN ITALIAN POLICY ON BIOTECHNOLOGY.

4. ACTION REQUEST: EMBASSY ASKS OES APPROVAL OF THE BILATERAL COOPERATION CONCEPT. SECOND, WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT FOR AN INTERAGENCY EXPERTS MEETING IN THE FALL IN ORDER TO EXPLORE SPECIFIC AREAS FOR COOPERATION. SPECIFICALLY WE ENVISION BIOTERRORISM AND PLANT VACCINES; ENVIRONMENTAL REMEDIATION; AGRICULTURE BIOTECHNOLOGY AND FOOD QUALITY; RENEWABLE INDUSTRIAL FOOD SAFETY; NANOBIOBIOTECHNOLOGY; AND DEVELOPING COUNTRIES USE OF BIOTECHNOLOGY. PRIOR TO THE MEETING, WE WILL NEED TO DECIDE WHETHER THE ACTIVITIES ARE ADEQUATELY COVERED UNDER THE EXISTING SANDT AGREEMENT AND ITS ANNEXES, OR WHETHER A NEW ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENT, E.G. LIKE THAT OF THE U.S.-EU BIOTECH TASK FORCE, WILL BE

MOST EFFECTIVE. END OF ACTION REQUEST.
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